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Using the WIAT 4 Canadian French with French Immersion Students

The WIAT® 4^{CDN-F} normative sample included students whose first or primary language was French (L1 French) and who were educated primarily in French. French immersion students were not included in the normative sample. Consequently, the norms do not provide a directly representative comparison group for French immersion students, and norm-referenced scores should not be interpreted in isolation.

Nevertheless, the WIAT 4^{CDN-F} can provide useful information about the achievement performance of French immersion students when norm-referenced scores are interpreted cautiously and considered alongside qualitative analyses, relevant background information, and converging evidence from other sources.

1. Interpreting Norms for French Immersion Students

When reporting standard scores, percentiles, and base rates, examiners should explicitly state that the student is being compared with a norm group of French speakers educated primarily in French. Determining how well the student's language and educational background align with the WIAT 4^{CDN-F} normative sample is a clinical or educational team judgment. The following guidance may support interpretation:

- Consider conservative decision rules with confidence intervals. Consider a score "clearly below expected" only when the entire 95% confidence interval falls below the cutoff, meaning the upper bound is below the threshold. This approach reduces the risk of false positives when the student's French exposure is lower than that of the norm group.
- If the confidence interval overlaps the cutoff, do not interpret the score alone as clearly establishing performance below the cutoff. Rely upon other sources of information such as qualitative analyses, classroom functioning, and convergence across measures, to cross-validate the results.



- Consider cross-language corroboration when appropriate. When clinically or educationally indicated, consider assessment in the student's other language using appropriately normed measures, such as the WIAT 4 Canadian English. Examine whether patterns of difficulty converge across languages and sources of evidence, while recognizing that scores obtained in different languages or from different normative samples should not be treated as directly equivalent. For reading disorder hypotheses, relevant areas for cross-language examination may include phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming, word reading and pseudoword decoding, spelling, and reading comprehension.

- Interpret results in relation to the student's age of entry into immersion, years of French instruction, proportion of instruction delivered in French, language use outside school, and opportunities to learn the skills assessed. The influence of these factors may differ across academic domains and students. For example, French immersion learners may show larger gaps relative to Francophone norms in earlier grades, particularly in aspects of oral and written expression. These differences may narrow as French exposure increases.

2. Prioritize Qualitative Interpretation

Demands analysis can be used with French immersion students to interpret performance by identifying the input, processing, and output demands of each task and integrating behavioural observations, such as comprehension of directions, response language, fatigue, and self-monitoring. As an informal qualitative analysis, examiners may examine whether performance appears to differ across cognates and non-cognates on relevant vocabulary and word-level reading tasks in the WIAT 4^{CDN-F}. Any apparent pattern should be treated as hypothesis-generating rather than as a standardized or validated WIAT 4^{CDN-F} score and should be interpreted alongside broader evidence about French proficiency and academic skills. Relevant subtests in this comparison would include Receptive Vocabulary, Expressive Vocabulary, Orthographic Fluency, and Word Reading. The inputs, processes, and outputs associated with a demands analysis approach are categorized by WIAT 4 subtest in the Technical and Interpretive Manual, Chapter 3.

Error-analysis procedures, available on select WIAT 4 subtests, provide additional information when performance is at least 1 SD below the normative mean and are well suited to assessment in French immersion because they emphasize qualitative skill patterns rather than relying solely on norm-referenced scores. Error patterns may help clarify whether weaknesses reflect decoding or phonological processing, broader French language knowledge, or a combination of factors. Error analysis guidance is provided in the Technical and Interpretive Manual, Chapter 3, including information about subtest availability and score-range guidance.

3. Use Quantitative Comparisons Cautiously

Ability–achievement comparisons using the WIAT 4^{CDN-F} and WISC V^{CDN-F} can identify patterns of cognitive and academic strengths and weaknesses using critical values and significance testing. Intra-individual comparisons among WIAT 4 subtests and composites can also help identify relative strengths and weaknesses within the student's achievement profile. When using critical values and base rates for discrepancy or pairwise comparisons, interpret statistical unusualness cautiously for French immersion students, as these values are derived from the WIAT 4^{CDN-F} normative sample and may not reflect the frequency of such score patterns among immersion learners. In higher-risk decision contexts, consider a more stringent alpha level, such as .01, to reduce Type I error. Interpret differences in conjunction with reliability, instructional history, and behavioural observations.

4. Suggested Reporting Language

The following wording may be adapted for inclusion in reports when the WIAT 4^{CDN-F} is used with a French immersion student:

"The WIAT 4^{CDN-F} scores are based on norms from French-speaking students educated primarily in French. Given that the student is enrolled in French immersion and has had different French exposure than the normative group, results were interpreted using conservative decision rules, qualitative error and demands analyses, and, when available, cross-language evidence."

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